# Breeding management in Sheep

## sheep breeding management

### Types of Breeding

| Type | Description |
|---|---|
| **Natural Mating** | Most common; ewes and rams mate during heat cycle |
| **Artificial Insemination (AI)** | Not widely practiced in Nigeria; requires technical expertise and semen storage |
| **Controlled Breeding** | Mating is planned, and rams are introduced only during specific breeding seasons |

### Breeding Age and Maturity

| Sheep Class | Age of Maturity | Breeding Age |
|---|---|---|
| Ewe (female) | 5–8 months | 8–12 months (min. 30–35 kg body weight) |
| Ram (male) | 6–8 months | 10–12 months |

### Breeding Seasons in Nigeria

| Region | Peak Season | Lambing Season (after 5-month gestation) |
|---|---|---|
| Northern Nigeria | June – August | November – January |
| Southern Nigeria | March – May | August – October |

Note: Sheep can breed all year round, but seasonal breeding aligns lambing with feed availability.

### Signs of Heat in Ewes

- Restlessness and bleating
- Frequent urination
- Swollen and red vulva
- Standing still when mounted
- Tail wagging

**Estrus lasts 24–36 hours**; occurs every **17 days** if not pregnant.

**Selection Criteria for Breeding Stock**

| Breeding Rams | Breeding Ewes |
|---|---|
| Fast-growing and well-muscled | Regular lambing history |
| Free from genetic defects | Mothered twins or triplets |
| Good libido | Healthy udder and teats |
| Disease-free and vaccinated | Good maternal instinct |


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## Reproductive Targets

| Parameter | Target Value |
|---|---|
| Lambing interval | 8–10 months |
| Litter size (per lambing) | 1.5–2 (twins desirable) |
| Lamb survival rate | >85% |
| Ewe conception rate | >90% during breeding season |

## Breeding Management Practices

| Practice | Purpose/Notes |
|---|---|
| **Flushing** | Feeding high-quality diet before mating to improve fertility |
| **Pregnancy diagnosis** | Done at 45–60 days post-mating (by palpation or scanning) |
| **Separate pregnant ewes** | For special care and better feeding |
| **Record keeping** | Track breeding dates, lambing, litter size, health |
| **Ram:ewe ratio** | 1:20 to 1:30 for natural service |
| **Cull poor breeders** | Remove non-productive or genetically flawed animals |

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## Care of Pregnant and Lactating Ewes

- Feed more energy- and protein-rich diet during last 6 weeks of pregnancy
- Avoid stress and long-distance movement
- Provide clean bedding and a quiet lambing pen
- Assist weak lambs with colostrum feeding in the first 2 hours

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